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GDC 2015 Producer Bootcamp

The Bane of All Developer Postmortems: Communication is Hard so Give Up Now.

Aaron Thibault
VP of Product Development & EP, Gearbox Software
Lecturer, Baylor University



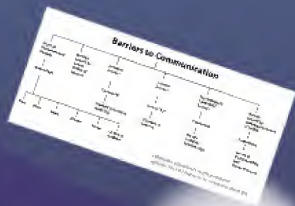
Communication Requires Effort

You have to make it a habit.

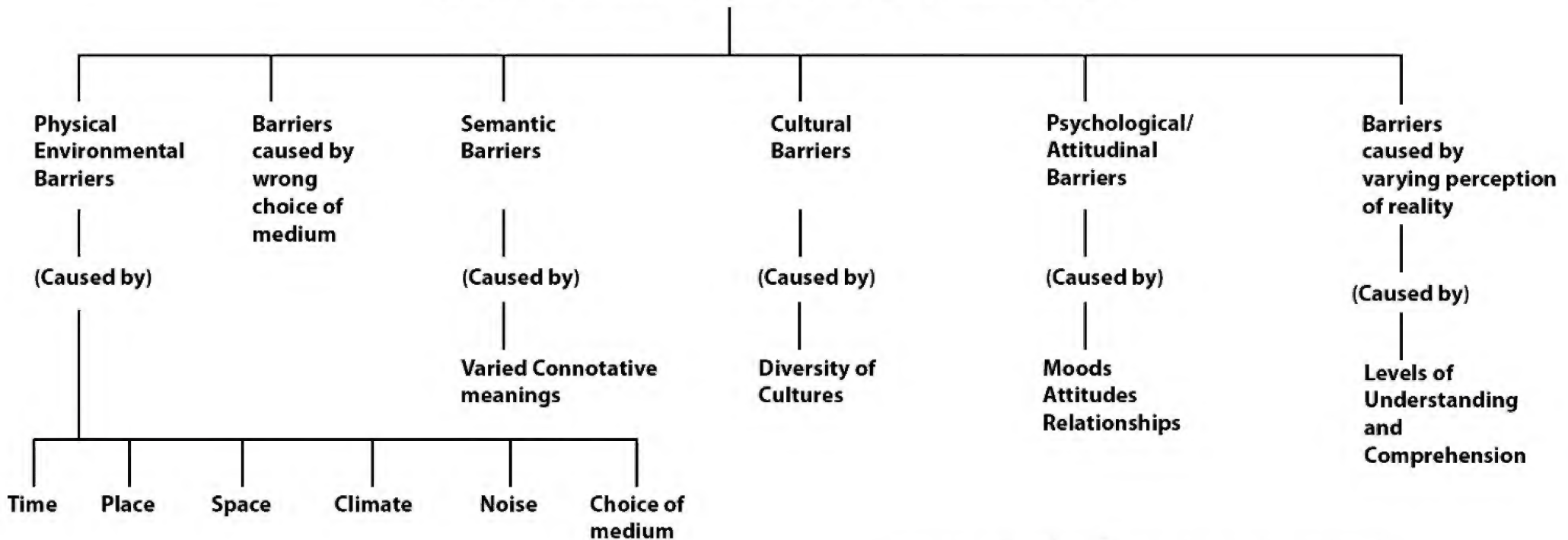
THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE
by Franklin Covey

**HABIT 5: SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN
TO BE UNDERSTOOD**

Communication is the most important skill in life. You spend years learning how to read and write, and years learning how to speak. But what about listening? What training have you had that enables you to listen so you really, deeply understand another human being? Probably none, right?

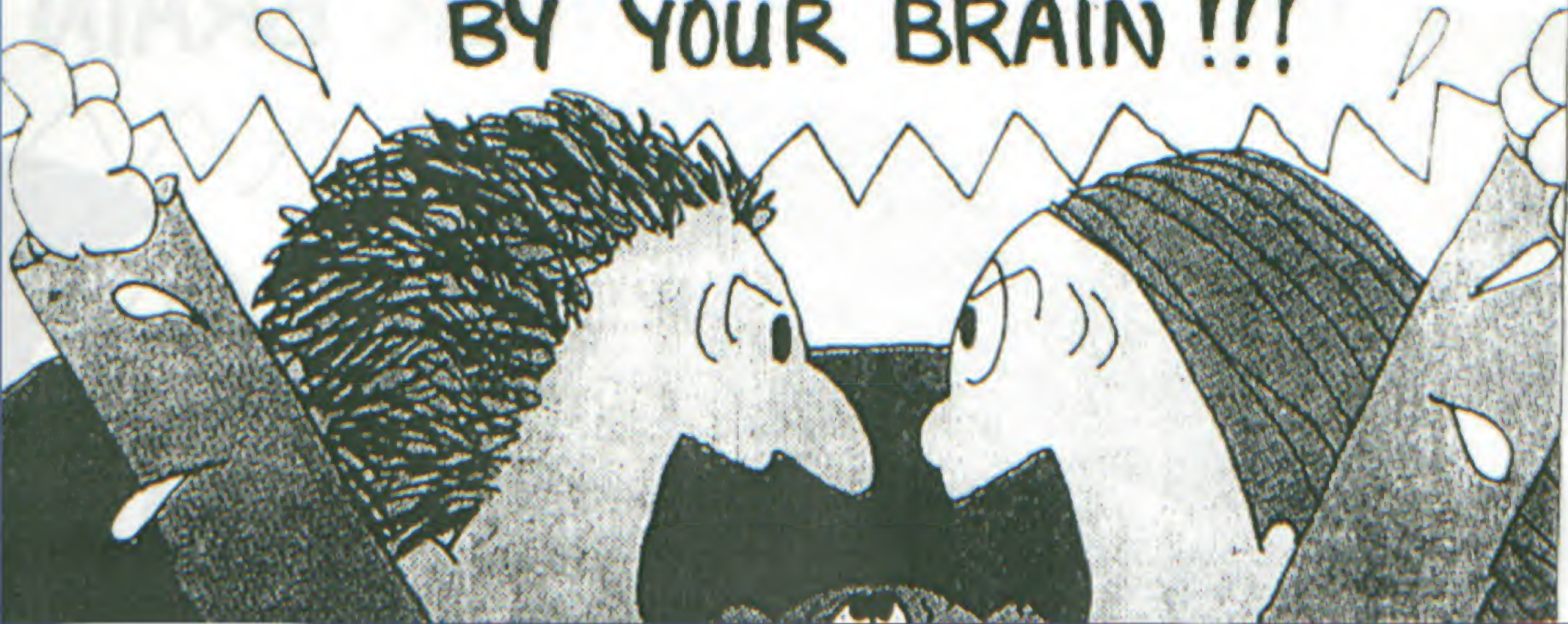


Barriers to Communication



communicationtheory.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/barriers-to-communication.jpg

MY WORDS CAME OUT FINE!
THEY WERE PROCESSED INCORRECTLY
BY YOUR BRAIN !!!





POSTMORTEM AND PRODUCTION

http://twvideo01.ubm-us.net/o1/vault/GD_Mag_Archives/GDM_January_2009.pdf

LAST MONTH WE RAN AN ARTICLE CALLED

What Went Wrong, highlighting common mistakes in game development as seen through postmortems. There was one area which I wanted to highlight, but didn't have the space for—when developers continue to make the same mistakes they've made before.

It comes up quite often. The author begins by saying something like "this is really important to

STRANGLEHOLD

"Quality of life is really important to us. When we started we realized that it was a problem, but in the end we still failed."

—Brian

PROBLEM OF PRODUCTION

These comments are all from developers who should know better.

Retrospectives & AARs

Team Learning

Sprint Retrospectives: Team Discussion
START - STOP - CONTINUE

**AARs: Leaders coaching team members about
their performance in the team context.**

Maintaining Best
Practices Requires
SITUATIONAL
AWARENESS

FREQUENCY of
GOAL TRACKING

VIGILANCE

Saying
"I don't know"
is a Best Practice



**Maintaining Best
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**SITUATIONAL
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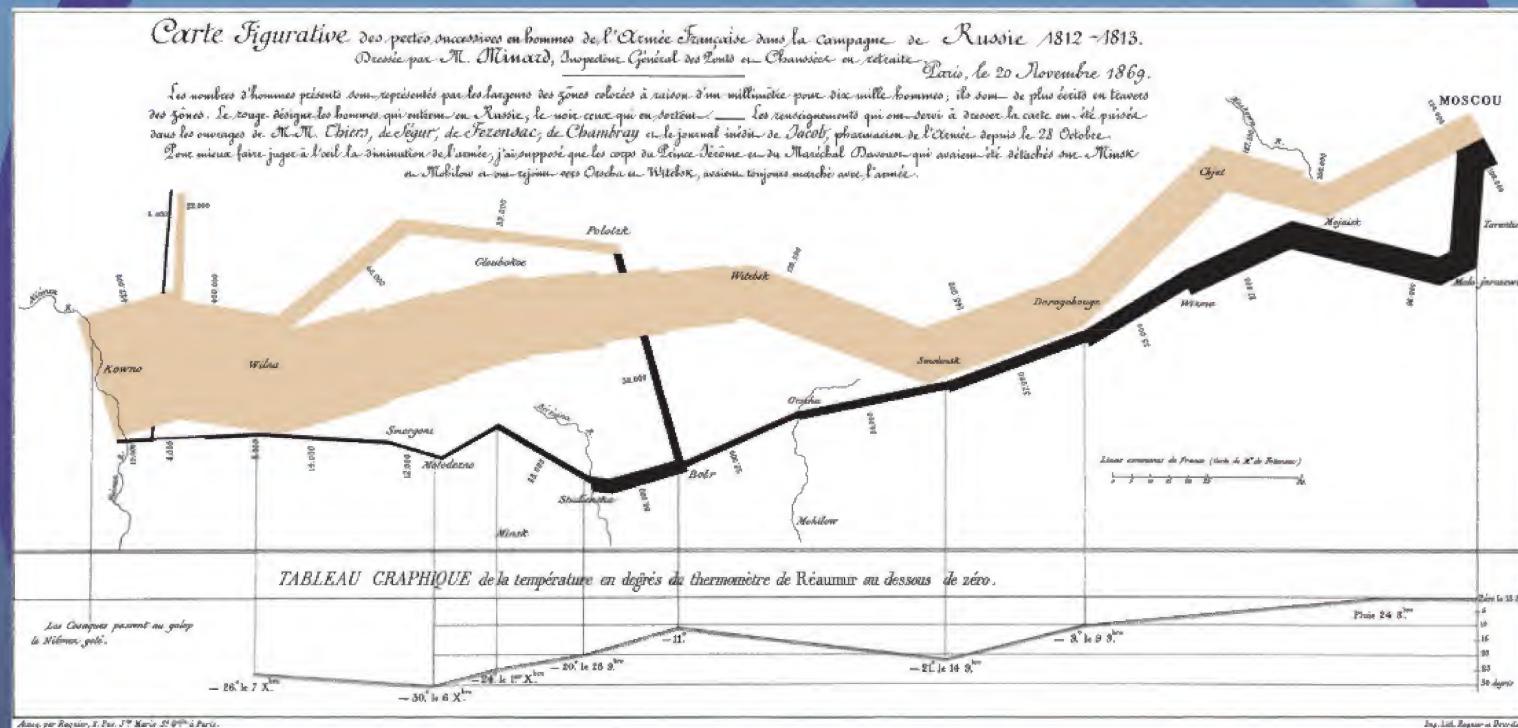
TRIPLE FACEPALM

Not even double facepalm can explain how much you fail



Saying
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Communication To Avoid a Death March



Figurative Map of the successive losses in men of the French Army in the Russian campaign 1812-1813.
 Charles Joseph Minard

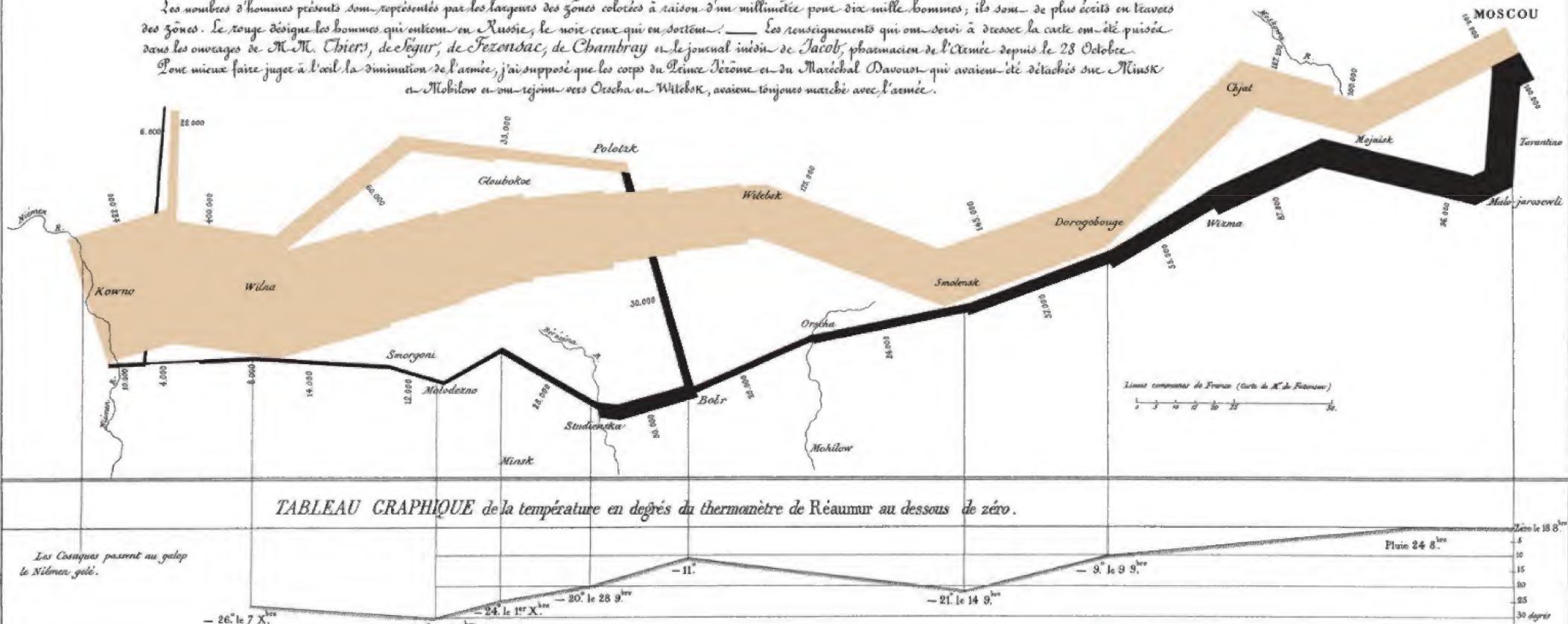
Communication To Avoid a Death March

Carte Figurative des pertes successives en hommes de l'Armée Française dans la campagne de Russie 1812-1813.

Dressée par M. Minard, Inspecteur Général des Ponts et Chaussées en retraite. Paris, le 20 Novembre 1869.

Les nombres d'hommes présents sont représentés par les largeurs des zones colorées à raison d'un millimètre pour dix mille hommes; ils sont de plus écrits en travers des zones. Le rouge désigne les hommes qui ont été en Russie, le noir ceux qui en sont sortis. — Les renseignements qui ont servi à dresser la carte ont été puisés dans les ouvrages de M. M. Chiers, de Ligny, de Fezensac, de Chambray et le journal inédit de Jacob, pharmacien de l'Armée depuis le 28 Octobre.

Pour mieux faire juger à l'œil la diminution de l'armée, j'ai supposé que les corps du Prince Jérôme et du Maréchal Davout qui avaient été détachés sur Minsk et Mohilow et qui rejoignent vers Orscha et Witebsk, avaient toujours marché avec l'armée.



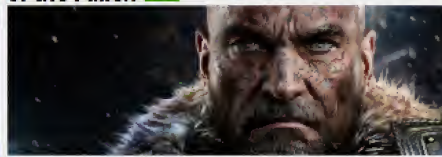
Figurative Map of the successive losses in men of the French Army in the Russian campaign 1812-1813.
Charles Joseph Minard

Productive Communication Requires Discipline, Organization and Maturity

STRUCTURE

Basically we had not thought about establishing guidelines for communication and things only got better when we did so. For a start, we stopped the wild communication between so many people at publisher and developer teams, employing "channel" people, mainly department leads, who would be responsible for gathering and distributing feedback.

Postmortem: Deck13 Interactive's *Lords of the Fallen*



Jan Klose (director) and Thorsten Lange (technical director) worked on German studio Deck13 Interactive's *Lords of the Fallen*, which launched worldwide October 2014 on PS4, Xbox One, and PC.

February 22, 2015 | By Jan Klose, Thorsten Lange

7 comments

More: Console/PC, Design, Production, Console

Missing throughout most of the project was a managing producer, someone who loves reading and writing schedules and charts, asking the tough questions and making tough decisions regarding scale, features, and deadlines. To put it short, someone who knows what to throw out of a project to make it happen. Instead, creative people on both the developer's and the publisher's side were striving to create the most beautiful, content-packed game one can imagine, with the result that schedules were too crammed, people had too much on their desks and were not able to finish all the desired features on both sides.

Postmortem: Deck13 Interactive's *Lords of the Fallen* EXCLUSIVE



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February 12, 2015 | By Jan Klose, Thorsten Lange



7 comments

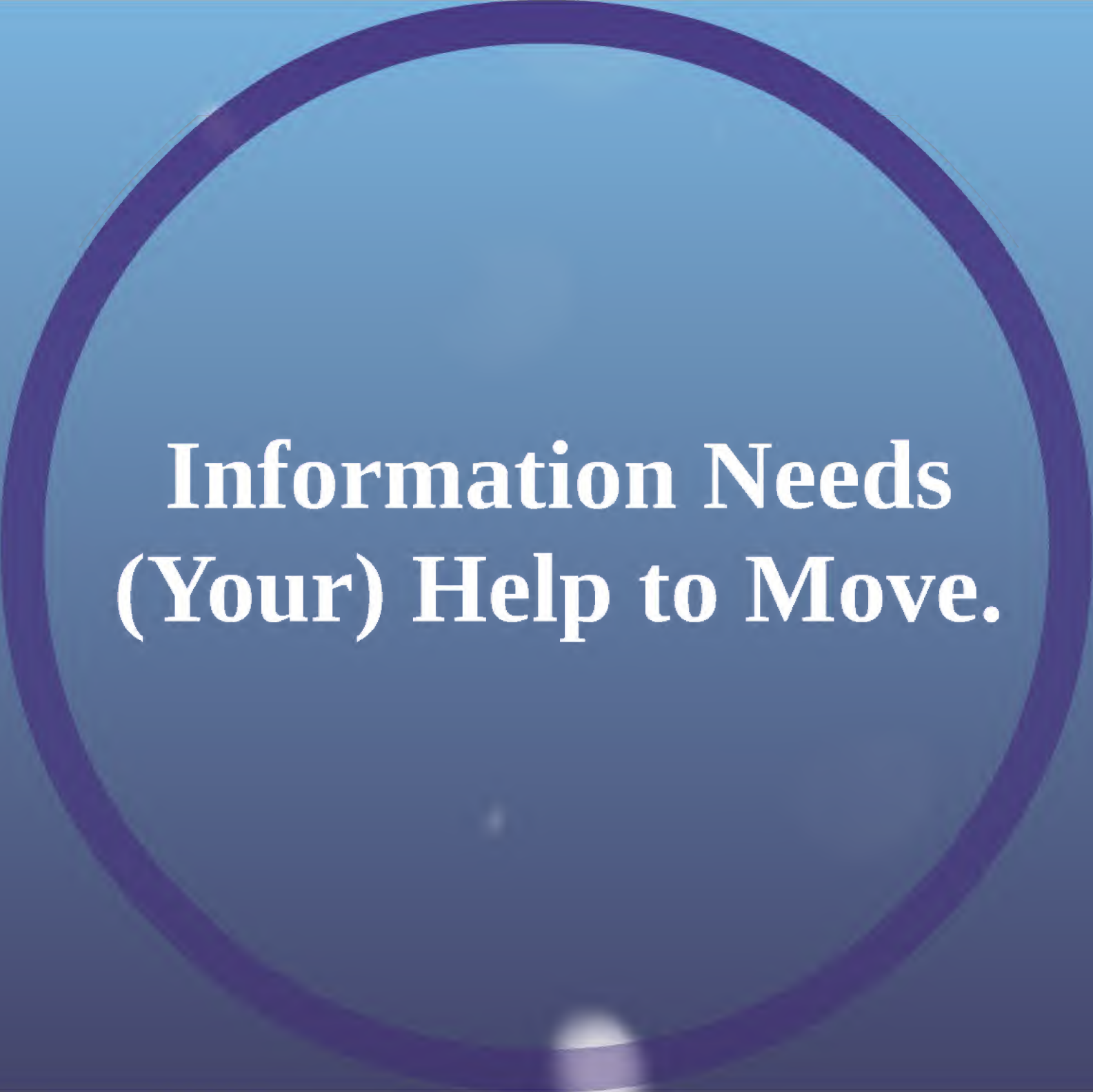
More: [Console/PC](#), [Design](#), [Production](#), [Exclusive](#)



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**Information Needs
(Your) Help to Move.**

Sometimes the thing that is holding you back...



...is all in your head.



**Remind Devs what
They're Doing is
AWESOME.**

(S) Gróblak the All-Eater

VETERAN WARCHIEF  **Power 11**

MOTIVE: Demanding that his supporters save their bloodlust for his enemies.

WEAKNESSES

-  **Vulnerable to Stealth Finishers**
Can be killed instantly using Stealth Finishers
-  **Hint: Damaged by Combat Finishers**
Can be injured by Combat Finishers

STRENGTHS

-  **Heir of Caragors**
Becomes enraged at the sight of Caragors
-  **Monster Slayer**
Able to kill monsters quickly, and resistant to their attacks
-  **Savage Weapon**
Weapon inflicts deep wounds that bleed over time
-  **Vault Breaker**
Blocks attempts to jump over him
-  **Battle-Hardened**
Harder to kill, and may require you to finish him
-  **Regeneration**
Continually heals rapidly
-  **Fast Runner**
Runs much faster than most Unlaks



WARCHIEFS

Brutal leaders, maintaining control with the constant threat of violence



BODYGUARDS

Henchmen to the Warchiefs



CAPTAINS

Officers of Sauron's Army
Constantly backstabbing each other.



Throughout development, we didn't do a great job of communicating the promise of the Nemesis System, either internally or externally. This created an additional burden of explanation each time we demoed or pitched the game and made the game feel more systemic and mechanical than we wanted.

EVANGELIZE PROMOTE CONNECT

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Tips for a Successful Cabal area (programming, art, and so on). Arguing over an issue that no one at the meeting actually understands is a sure way to waste everyone's time.

2. Write down everything. Brainstorming is fine during the meetings, but unless it's all written down, your best ideas will be forgotten within days. The goal is to end up with a document that captures as much as importantly answers questions about what people need to work on.

The Cabal: Valve's Design Process For Creating *Half-Life*

by Ken Birdwell [Design]

10 comments [f](#) [Share](#) [+](#) [D](#)

December 10, 1999 [14 Article Start](#) Page 1 of 4 [Next >](#)



While *Half-Life* has seen resounding critical and financial success (winning over 50 Game of the Year awards and selling more than a million copies worldwide), few people realize that it didn't start out a winner — in fact, Valve's first attempt at the game had to be scrapped. It was mediocre at best, and suffered from the typical problems that plague far too many games. This article is about the teamwork — or “Cabal process” — that turned our initial, less than impressive version of *Half-Life* into a groundbreaking success.

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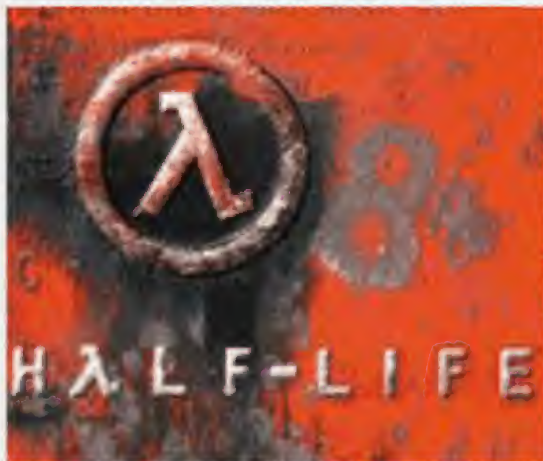


December 10, 1999

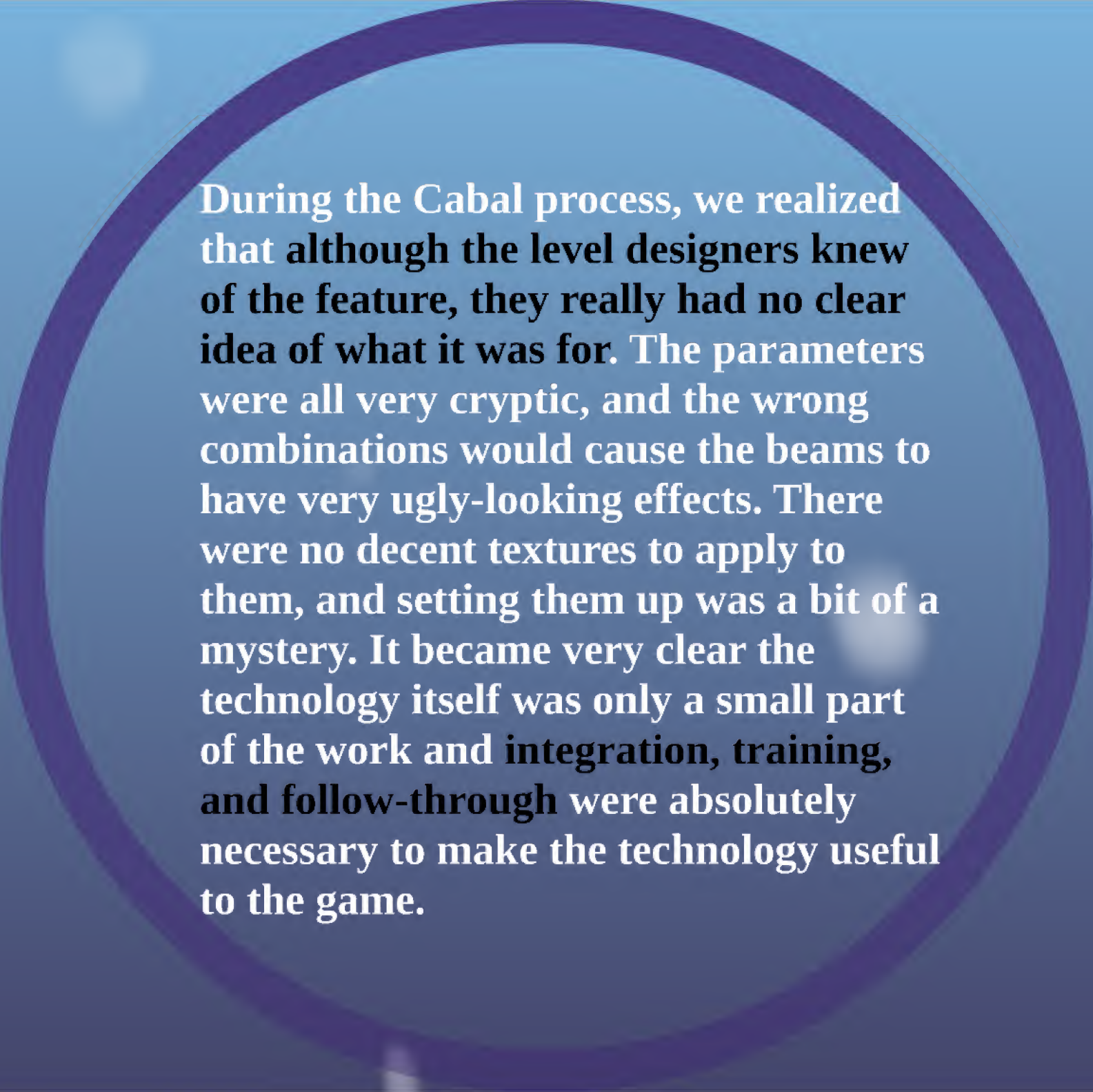
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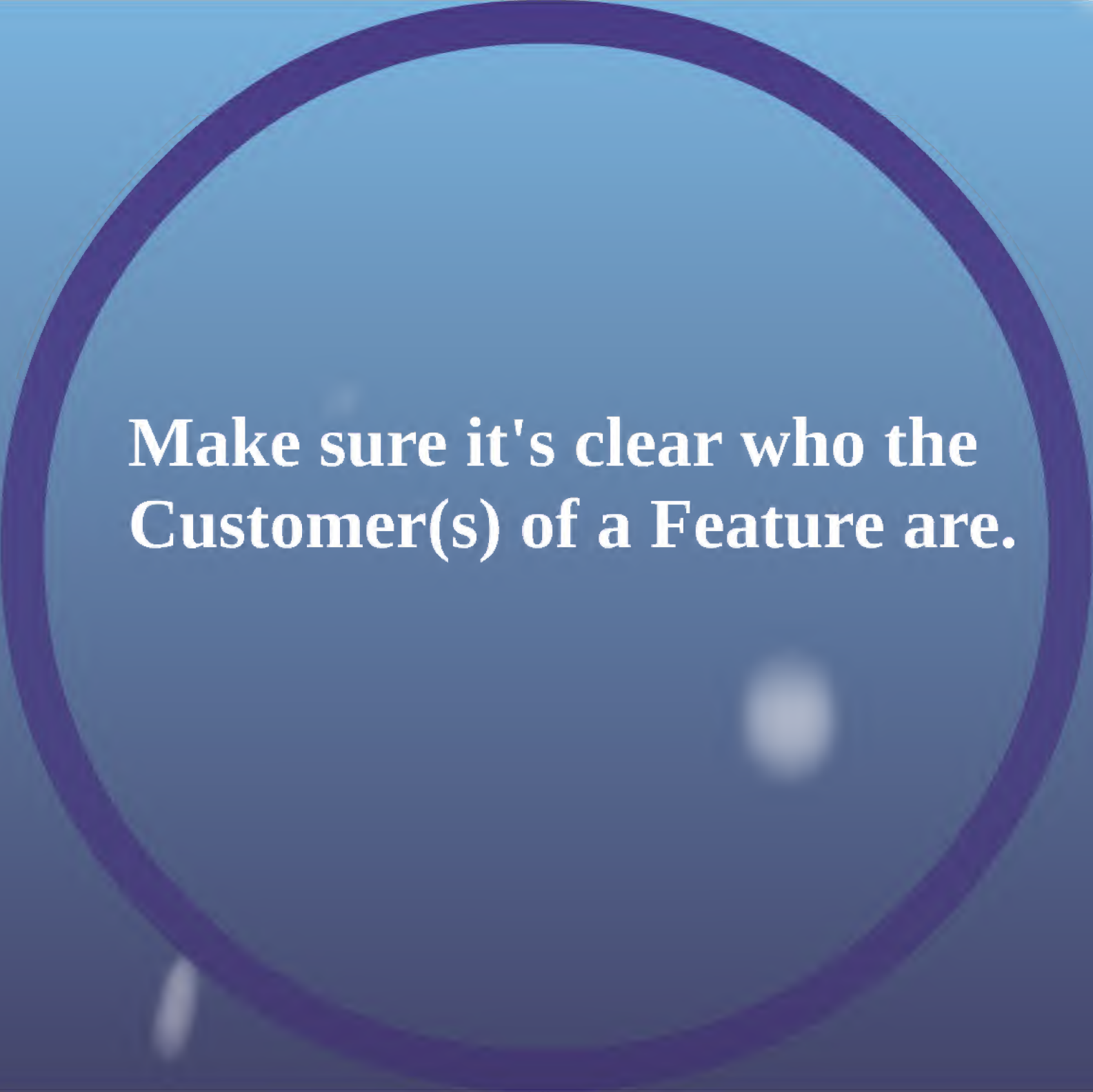
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During the Cabal process, we realized that although the level designers knew of the feature, they really had no clear idea of what it was for. The parameters were all very cryptic, and the wrong combinations would cause the beams to have very ugly-looking effects. There were no decent textures to apply to them, and setting them up was a bit of a mystery. It became very clear the technology itself was only a small part of the work and integration, training, and follow-through were absolutely necessary to make the technology useful to the game.



**Make sure it's clear who the
Customer(s) of a Feature are.**

Tips for a Successful Cabal

1. Include an expert from every functional area (programming, art, and so on).

Arguing over an issue that no one at the meeting actually understands is a sure way to waste everyone's time.

2. Write down everything. Brainstorming is fine during the meetings, but unless it's all written down, your best ideas will be forgotten within days. The goal is to end up with a document that captures as much as is reasonable about your game, and more importantly answers questions about what people need to work on.

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Asking the Hard Questions

HIRING | ASSESSING | RESOLVING DISPUTES

Behavioral Descriptive Questions

HIRING
"Tell me about a time when..."
"Give me an example of..."



Socratic Method

"Do **we** know how performance is impacted by these changes?"
"Do **we** know how it's going to be rigged?"
"Have **we** considered the impact to coop?"
"Is there another way to accomplish the same thing?"
"How will **we** know if it's good?"

1. Don't Ask Illegal Questions!
2. Use a Formal Hiring Process

STAY FOCUSED ON JOB PERFORMANCE
ONLY ONLY

DO NOT ASK ABOUT
PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS: AGE, SEX, RACE,
AFFILIATIONS, RELIGION, DISABILITY

GET PROFESSIONAL HR TRAINING

Focus on
-the Issues / Topics at hand
-the need for discipline
-the rigor of Development
Not the Person

Behavioral Descriptive Questions

HIRING

"Tell me about a time when..."

"Give me an example of..."



1. Don't Ask
2. Use a



Candidates tell
you a lot about
themselves if
you listen well.

I'm looking for the least possible amount
of responsibility.

- 
- 1. Don't Ask Illegal Questions!**
 - 2. Use a Formal Hiring Process**

STAY FOCUSED ON **JOB PERFORMANCE**
Q&A ONLY.

DO NOT ASK ABOUT
PERSONAL IDENTIFIERS (Age, Sex, etc)
AFFILIATIONS, RELIGION, DISABILITY

GET PROFESSIONAL HR TRAINING

Socratic Method

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Questions!
Process
ANCE

the Is

Focus on
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Not the Person

Questions are Powerful

Practice Listening

Practice getting
Conversations Moving

Stay On Topic

Speak with Intent

Know Your 'Audience'



Questions are Powerful


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**Practice getting
Conversations Moving**

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Dec 2008

WHAT WENT WRONG

RETURN

OF THE POSTMORTEMS!



Square Enix's *Final Fantasy XII*

***Final Fantasy XII* (Square Enix, Taku Murata)** "During the development of *Final Fantasy XII*, the pressure to succeed was at such a high point that we were on the brink of losing control during even the slightest misunderstanding. What happened was our team was given the freedom to make changes at various stages of development, but the adverse affect of this freedom was miscommunication, confusion, and disorder. How work was to be distributed was also often ambiguous, which contributed to the problem."

Management overhead is a particularly large problem in Japan, but that's not to say it can't happen at home, too. Often there are too many managers, but not enough actual management going on. Sound familiar?

The Game Outcomes Project, Part 3: Game Development Factors

Communication & Feedback

by Paul Tozour on 01/13/15 01:30:00 pm

Expert Blogger

Featured Post

We included several questions about the extent to which communication and feedback play a role in team effectiveness:

	Correlation with:					Category Score
	Project Delays	\$ ROI	MetaCritic	Internal Goals	Aggregate Outcome	
The entire team met frequently to openly discuss topics of interest and ask questions. Members had easy access to communicate with senior leadership about the project, raise concerns, or discuss personal issues. Team members would often work for weeks at a time without receiving feedback from project leads or managers. The company's culture preferred face-to-face communication over e-mail.	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.30	0.25	0.39
	0.13	0.23	0.22	0.36	0.30	
	-0.29	-0.32	-0.21	-0.43	-0.39	
	Not statistically significant					

Figure 5. Questions around communication and their correlations.

Clearly, regular feedback from project leads and managers (our third question in this category) is key – our third question ties in very closely with factor #11 in the Gallup team effectiveness model from [Part 2](#), with virtually identical correlations with project outcomes. Easy access to senior leadership (the second question) is also clearly quite important.

Regular communication between the entire team (the first question) is somewhat less important but still shows significant positive correlations across the board. Meanwhile, our final question revealed no significant differences between cultures that preferred e-mail vs face-to-face communication.

power of a

Friend



The No Bully Zone

Zero Tolerance DO NOT ALLOW

No Sarcasm that Puts Down Coworkers

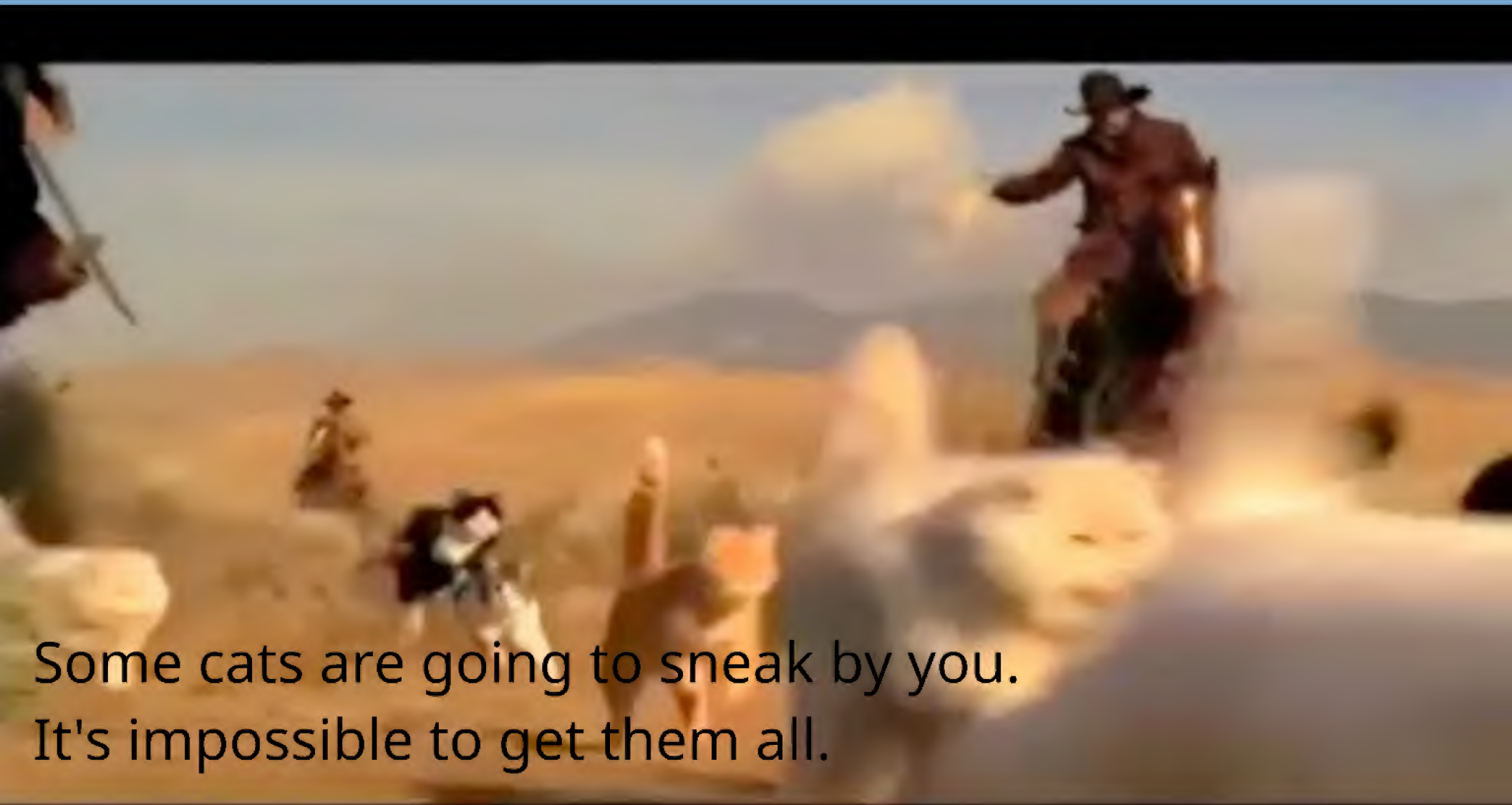
**No Condescending or Back Handed
Task Comments. WATCH FOR THIS!!**

No Name Calling

**With that said, you should also not tolerate
Low Performance
and
Bad Processes**

**"They had the same
information as me.
How could they have come to a
different conclusion??"**





Some cats are going to sneak by you.
It's impossible to get them all.

The manual how to catch a cat:

1. Bring an empty box
2. Wait...



Perfect Communication isn't possible.
Making games is still difficult.
But it's better than almost everything else.

Practice communication skills every day.
Keep learning.

Go make great games. Write new postmortems.

@aaronthibault



gearbox[®]
software